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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to provide Australian early childhood workers with information about domestic violence and response techniques to employ if they become aware that children under their care are witnessing domestic violence. The booklet notes that domestic violence can include physical and sexual violence, as well as psychological, social, and economic abuse. It can have multiple detrimental effects on children, provoking tiredness, sleep disorders, timidity, aggression, withdrawal, eating disorders, health problems, poor hygiene, sensitivity, and attendance problems. The booklet also addresses various myths about domestics violence. Finally, the booklet emphasizes that early childhood workers need to support victims of domestic violence by: (1) believing their reports of abuse; (2) discussing safety strategies; (3) notifying the police; (4) informing victims about refuges and crisis services; (5) taking victims' fear seriously; and (6) helping the children of victims. Early childhood workers can help prevent domestic violence by encouraging children to be cooperative, exerting authority over children in a respectful manner, fostering equality and respect for others, and preventing children from using violence against each other. A list of domestic violence crisis telephone numbers is included. (MDM)

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BREAKING THE SILENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

PS 022363

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Information for Children's Services Workers

HEATHER McGREGOR

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FOREWORD

This booklet came about as the result of a decision by the Australian Early Childhood Association and the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) to help people working with young children gain a better understanding of an issue which is too little discussed, and often misunderstood. The OSW were interested in spreading the message about domestic violence to workers who, often without realising it, work with many children who are living in the midst of violence. AECA was concerned to support early childhood workers to confront constructively this difficult and disturbing issue.

The booklet aims primarily to give early childhood workers information about domestic violence. It also discusses some ways in which workers can respond if they become aware that children in their programs are witnessing violence. Other Resource Booklets published by AECA which may give further help to workers are *It Could Happen in Any Family: Child Abuse* by Elizabeth Smart and *Keeping Our Children Safe: Protective Behaviour Programs in Early Childhood Settings* by Coleen Clare and Diana Roe.

Domestic violence has existed in our society, as it exists in every society, in a conspiracy of silence. Largely as a result of the National Domestic Violence Education Program within the OSW, that silence is beginning to break, and major professional groupings such as doctors, judges, and the clergy are beginning to examine the possibility that they may in some way be contributing to the perpetuation of domestic violence.

This booklet will present a challenging message to early childhood workers. It confronts the reality of domestic violence, which is that perpetrators are men and victims are women, and explains the social structural dimension of domestic violence - the fact that domestic violence is partly created by inequalities between men and women, and is really about an abuse of power, rather than unresolved conflict.

The final challenge in this booklet is the message that early childhood workers may, in their own practices, be inadvertently supporting the continuation of domestic violence in society. The booklet presents ideas as to how early childhood workers can help young boys and girls in their care learn new ways of inter-relating, so that hopefully, along with many other changes that need to occur at all levels within the community, domestic violence can finally become a part of our history, rather than stay an unpalatable present reality.

Pamela Cahir
National Director

Jean Gifford
Deputy National Director

BREAKING THE SILENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Information for Children's Services Workers

HEATHER McGREGOR

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is about domestic violence: in particular about household violence between adults and the effects on children of living with violence. It is intended to be useful to people who work with children in terms of understanding domestic violence and responding to children who may be living with violence in their home. This booklet is not specifically about child abuse (please see an earlier AECA publication *It Could Happen in Any Family: Child Abuse* for this information).

It is difficult to estimate the incidence of violence in the home and there is a lack of reliable research information. We do know, however, that women and children are primarily the victims. Studies estimate that somewhere between one in three and one in ten households are affected by violence at some time. Violence at home is often kept secret sometimes because of the shame people may mistakenly feel, and sometimes people do not identify what is happening to them as "domestic violence", therefore estimates tend to be underestimates.

There are, however, many indications of widespread abuse occurring in the context of the home. One example is the great deal of police time involved in attending domestic disputes. In NSW in 1980-81 the police identified domestic violence as their second most demanding area of work (NSW Police Annual Report, 1987).

It is very likely that in the group of children you work with there is someone living with violence.

For too long, misunderstanding, myths and misinformation have dominated the topic of domestic violence. An analysis of domestic violence arising from a focus on individuals has had widespread acceptance, resulting in victims of violence being blamed and held responsible for the violence. For this reason, this booklet spends a great deal of time analysing the subject, so that it aims to be not only practical and instructive, but also educational and informative.

This booklet intends to help you understand the social context of domestic violence, to offer practical suggestions in terms of responding to children affected by violence, and to familiarize you with options available to victims of violence in the home.

There is no easy or certain way of identifying a child who is living with violence, nor is there any easy course of action. However, violence in the home must be stopped and we all must take our share of the responsibility to break the silence. It is hoped that this booklet will give you some ideas.

There is a reading list at the back of the booklet if you want to do further reading. Also, there is a list of services in each State which you can contact for further information.

VIOLENCE AT HOME

It is difficult to accept that the sacred place called "home" can, for many people in our society, be a violent place.

Men are occasionally abused , but almost always it is women and children who are the victims of violent assault in the home. No assumptions should be made about abusers. Men who abuse their female partners may or may not abuse their children. Women who are victims of abuse may or may not abuse their children.

It is difficult to know just how many women are assaulted by their male partners, however, it is possible that as many as one in every three women who have a male partner will be assaulted by that partner at some stage in her life. Domestic violence is the most common form of assault in Australia today. In any case, violence towards female partners is a widespread practice and female homicides are most likely to be committed by male partners or a male known to the victim, and are most likely to occur after a history of domestic violence (Wallace, 1986).

The general consequence of people living with violence in the home is that a high proportion of

our population is suffering from the disturbing contradiction between what actually happens at home and the popular version of family life. Strong social pressures work against disclosure of the violence, and generally the truth is covered up under a shroud of shame and secrecy. This stressful effect adds to the already damaging effects of living with the violence itself. Thus there is a connection, which is not always made, between violence in the home and mental illness, depression and suicide, drug abuse and youth homelessness.

More than anything else, violence in the home cuts across the social values which relate to family life. When violence occurs in the home it is generally called "domestic violence". This term fails to convey exactly what occurs behind the closed doors of many Australian homes. Because the word "domestic" is associated with positive and pleasant images, it softens the impact of the word "violence", and tends to trivialize what is a serious matter.

Power

Everybody seems to have some explanation for violence in the home. However, the one factor that is always present in a relationship where there is violence is an inequality of power. Violence in the home is an abuse of power and is always perpetrated by a more powerful member against a less powerful member. Domestic violence is the use of power over others. This violence is an expression of a popularly endorsed inequality between men and women which places a man at the head of the household.

It is important to note that not all men are violent. As with other socialization processes, there are numerous influences in peoples' lives which determine values and attitudes. Just as some men are more imbued with competitive attitudes than others, so are some men more imbued with egalitarian, co-operative and respectful attitudes towards women.

Women sometimes behave violently or are verbally abusive, however, their behaviour always needs to be understood in the context of power inequality. Men, by virtue of being born male have more social status in our society than women do. They generally have greater physical strength, economic superiority and higher employment status.

WHAT IS "VIOLENCE"?

Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, psychological, social or economic. Violence generally refers to behaviour which results in damage or injury to another person, or behaviour which results in any person living in fear of another's behaviour.

Violence does not refer to common household arguments or conflicts. A distinction between violence and conflict is easily made because where there is violence there is an identifiable victim.

Physical Violence

Physical violence includes punching, shaking, hitting, pushing, grabbing, kicking, biting, breaking bones, bruising, burning, using weapons including knives, ropes or guns. The injuries are not always obvious as abusers often make sure the effects of their attacks are hidden under clothing. Physical abuse can also involve the denial of basic human needs, like sleep or nutrition. Physical violence can sometimes lead to murder and very often leads to serious physical injury.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence in the home can take the form of rape or sexual assault, that is forcing sexual acts on someone else. This is done by men to adult women and by adult parents to their children. Sexual intercourse without consent even in marriage is unacceptable and against the law in

some States. Sometimes the sexual assault can involve physical force and abuse, sometimes it does not, but nearly always there are threats or bizarre bribes involved.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse refers to words and behaviours which are intended to destroy or harm another person's belief in themselves. This includes verbal abuse which is aimed at demeaning and depowering the other person, for example, constant criticisms like "you are stupid", condemnation like "you are a great, ugly, fat slob", and humiliating remarks like "you are so hopeless nobody would want to know you". This verbal abuse usually happens regularly, sometimes incessantly, and has the effect of eroding a person's own belief in themselves and changing their self concept. Over time, it is likely that the person will take on the abusive descriptions as if they are real. They may begin to believe they are worthless, and that the violence is their fault.

Threats are a very common form of verbal violence, aimed at terrorizing the other person to such an extent that the abuser is in total control. "You leave me and I will kill you" is a regularly used threat, and given that male partners are the people to be most feared by women, (Wallace, 1986) this is a threat that ought to be taken seriously, especially if the abuser has access to a firearm or other weapon.

Other common threats are aimed at harming children, like "you leave and I'll kill you and the kids".

Psychological abuse is particularly debilitating to women who have been socialized to believe that they can only really feel good about themselves if they have "a man" (French, 1986), so if that man, the one they love, becomes abusive then most women do not have much resistance to this abuse. In our society women are generally discouraged from believing in themselves or developing a good self concept; if they do not have a man or get approval from men they are likely to feel worthless.

Social Abuse

Social abuse can be psychological or verbal abuse delivered in public. When women are constantly demeaned in front of other people by their male partners this is a form of social abuse. The put downs, the jokes, the criticisms, are made in front of friends or publicly at a party. Criticisms can be about the women's weight, appearance, sexuality, intelligence, ability to cope, or parenting skills.

Social abuse also includes controlling behaviour like following the person to work, controlling access to friends, constant phone calls at work or accusations of imagined "affairs". Men often make constant disparaging remarks about their wives' friends and family, which have the effect of isolating women from their social networks. Women often cut themselves off because they fear enraging their husbands.

Sometimes women are completely cut off from the rest of the community. This is managed by locking the woman in the house, not giving her access to any money, cutting the telephone off, and never leaving the car at home. If the woman comes from a non-English speaking background, this form of abuse can be totally controlling and depowering.

Economic Abuse

Sometimes women are controlled by the man's insistence that she hands over her pay packet to him, unopened. Women very often have no way to gain access to the family bank accounts and must ask, sometimes beg, for money to buy necessities. When the money is given, it is often the case that the woman cannot possibly provide food and necessities for the family with the amount, then she is criticized for being stupid and incompetent. Young girls may be controlled and humiliated by not being given money to buy sanitary napkins or tampons.

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

There is little reliable research evidence to draw on, so it is very difficult to know for sure if a child is living with violence. However, there are some possible indications which you may notice, but these should not be regarded as reliable or conclusive indicators, nor should they be ignored. These effects could possibly relate to child abuse as well.

Tiredness

Sometimes children are kept awake by violence and if they live with violence, they are very likely to have disturbed nights, either in anticipation of violence or directly because of it.

Sleeping

Children may develop sleeping disorders, bed wetting or be prone to frightening nightmares.

Timidity

Children living with violence may be fearful and timid because they live in fear. They may cower in threatening or menacing situations, or physically freeze when intimidated. They may not trust easily.

Aggression

Children who live with violence often learn to be aggressive and copy violent behaviour they observe at home. Behaviour can be quite extreme, like pushing furniture over or throwing toys.

Withdrawal

Children who live with violence sometimes withdraw and avoid eye contact or communication of any kind. They may take extra time to settle to a new routine, or to become used to new staff, particularly if they have had to flee a violent home, leaving precious things behind. It may have been impossible for them to gain a sense of trust in the home environment, and so they may be tentative and suspicious in the new environment.

This behaviour in a child could indicate abuse or home violence. Withdrawal can result in poor social relations and poor physical and mental competence, and conclusions about learning difficulties can be wrongly reached.

Eating Behaviour

Children living with violence may either lose their appetite or eat excessively. They may grab food, steal or even hide food.

Health

Some illnesses are related to living in situations of domestic violence. Stomach aches, headaches, asthma, skin disorders and disorders like stuttering, wetting or soiling pants, may all indicate violence at home.

Hygiene

Children may be unkempt in appearance or dirty. This may well be because the mother has been deprived the option to wash, to buy or use detergents, or to buy suitable clothing.

Sensitivity

Children, especially male children, who live with violence may become desensitized by it and may grow up with an insensitivity to the feelings of others, an insensitivity to physical pain and they may believe that violence is a normal part of life. This can result in the use of violence to solve problems with other children, or to attain power over others, or to gain some kind of advantage.

Coping

Children, especially female children, may develop coping mechanisms out of necessity; these may include being over concerned about pleasing, especially people in authority, to behave in an overly responsible way and to assume more responsibility than is usual, to deny angry feelings, to avoid conflict, to develop an ability to withdraw completely or switch off, and to tell lies.

Attendance

Attendance may be irregular. There may be long periods of absences, due to the mother's inability to get the child there, or to pay the fees. She may well be too ashamed for you to see the bruised state she is in.

Clearly, these behaviours may indicate a whole range of problems, but they may also be associated with children living in a violent environment.

MYTHS

There are many myths relating to domestic violence and which have served to perpetuate the violence and maintain the secrecy and shame. Popular ideas include erroneous beliefs like violence is caused by alcohol, violence is about stress, women provoke it, women like it, violence relates to social class. Another common misunderstanding is that violence is simply an extension of conflict or anger.

These myths are easily dispelled using common sense.

Myth: Alcohol is the cause of violence.

Reality: Certainly alcohol is sometimes involved when there is violence in a relationship. Sometimes the perpetrator of the violence is drunk, sometimes the victim is drunk, but alcohol is not involved every time there is violence. Alcohol is not the cause of violence. If alcohol caused violence then women would be as violent as men and this is clearly not the case. In any case, men who are drunk often direct their punches to places on a woman's body where the bruising will not show, which shows quite a degree of considered intent.

Myth: Violence happens mostly in poor people's homes.

Reality: Violence happens in all kinds of homes, in all kinds of streets, and does not relate to social class, socio-economic status, employment status, or educational status.

Myth: Violence is simply an extension of conflict or anger.

Reality: The idea that conflict causes violence or that violence is extreme conflict are quite wrong. Many survivors of violence report that in the period leading up to a violent attack there was no conflict. Women often go to great lengths to remove all sources of conflict they perceive in the relationship, in the belief that this will make the violence stop. They will try to cook better meals, stay awake for him no matter what time he gets home, have sex with him whenever he wants, have the children in bed before he gets home, have the house immaculate, lose weight, get a job, give up a job, give up friendships, keep thoughts and opinions private, sever relations with their family of origin, move house, move town, suggest counselling.

Women try everything they know to stop the violence by removing the perceived sources of conflict. Yet the violence does not stop.

Men are able to be angry or have conflict at work without becoming violent, just as they are able to drink alcohol with friends without becoming violent. There is no direct causal relationship. Conflict and anger are only a trigger for violence and a violent man will keep finding new reasons for being violent if the old reasons go away.

Myth: Violence is caused by stress.

Reality: Stress is another trigger for violence which is often confused as a cause. However, the same people who are under stress and are violent at home are usually not violent at work or towards non-family members.

Myth: Women provoke it/women ask for it.

Reality: Many people argue that women ask for violence, that is women are blamed for provoking the violence or for not being able to prevent it. Nobody ever asks for violence, nobody ever wants to be treated violently. It does not matter what someone has done, nobody ever deserves violence.

Myth: Violent men are monsters.

Reality: Many people seem to think that a violent man is easily recognizable. This, too, is a misunderstanding. Violent men can be rich or poor, tall or short, be uneducated or highly educated, unemployed or employed. They are capable of being charming and loving, as well as violent. They may be an unskilled labourer, or they may be a doctor or a member of the legal profession.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE ABOUT?

Social Context

It is important to place domestic violence in a social context to fully understand it and to be fully aware of the pervasive nature of the behaviour. Violence is not a relationship problem or issue, thus individualistic psychological theories are inadequate and have resulted in a "blame the victim" ideology. These theories are based on an assumption that men and women are equal, and they tend to locate the primacy of the violence inside people or inside relationships. This assumes that people live in captive isolation, unaffected by the social world.

If we take time to think about the world about us, violence is everywhere. At one extreme, war is a legitimised violent encounter between nations - a violent encounter which generally is socially accepted.

Historically, it is men who go to war. Through the use of violence against the enemy, violent behaviour has been glorified, men have become heroes and violence has become an approved form of male behaviour. Men became heroes on the basis of their violent behaviour, often in relation to saving "weaker" members of society, women and children.

Over time, violence has become implicit in the popular definition of masculinity. That is, our society gives messages to males that to be violent is to be manly. Some videos, films and advertisements, portray a "Rambo" type of man as ideal. Thus, a proper, attractive man, is a man who is big and strong and who will fight, rather than walk away. Males are socialized to be strong and tough and to fight and to be powerful.

Many male sporting events are fundamentally about exercising superior strength and power. The attractive male image portrayed on television is consistent with this, and often television commercials portray muscular, tough men. It is not surprising that boys adopt aggressive

behaviour as "normal". Similarly it is not surprising that boys expect girls to be compliant, gentle and subservient.

An understanding of the relevance of the social context, gender inequality and our history, makes it very clear that stopping domestic violence is about changing the world, not changing the victim. In the meantime, the focus should be on stopping the perpetrator, not further victimising the victim.

History

Our society historically has given males superior status in relation to women and even today, despite moves to improve the status of women, men who are violent to their female partners generally behave as if they have superior status and rights to women. Violent men tend to act as if they have a right to be violent when they think it is justified, that is when a female partner has behaved inappropriately according to his rules and definitions, or even at his whim.

For example, violence can be triggered by a trivial breaking of the rules such as a woman going to bed rather than waiting up for him, even though he gets home at 3 am.

Sometimes, however, there is no identifiable trigger and he appears to have simply decided it is about time for her to have a beating. There is often no relationship between the assault and anything the woman did or did not do.

This attitude of superiority and being in control relates to the idea that men are the owners of family members. Until the turn of this century, the law and social values raised male status by authorizing men to be the owners of property, to be the owners and controllers of women and children. Women were the property of fathers before marriage and husbands after marriage, and men were actually authorized in common law to beat their wives provided the instrument used was no thicker than his thumb.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Thanks to women, the silence surrounding violence in the home has begun to be broken. Women have spoken out about the brutality that was going on behind closed doors. Part of the secrecy related to the shame attached to violence in the home, part to real fears of recrimination for discussing family business outside the home, and part related to the fact that society saw violence in the home as a "problem" rather than as a crime.

We now understand that violence in the home relates to inequality between males and females. Women theorists dismissed all the myths and pointed out that in our society, gender and power are linked in a way which determines gender inequality, female subordination and economic dependence. They provided the first credible analysis of male violence against women, an analysis which stands up in the face of experience, which places the responsibility for the violence with the perpetrator, and which does not blame or implicate the victim.

Victims of violence are still often blamed for the violence. There is a common belief that women provoke violence, however, there is no justification for violence. No matter what a woman does, she does not deserve violence. Everybody has a right to be safe, especially at home.

Refuges

Refuges were established so that women have a safe place to go because the most important requirement of a victim of violence is having a safe place to stay. Refuge workers offer women safety and support, and are able to refer them to other services and to assist in practical and supportive ways. In Australia in 1989/90 there are approximately 310 refuges and other services for women and their children. On an average day about 2000 women and children use these refuges, most of them escaping domestic violence (DCS&H, 1990).

Law Reform

Community concern about violence in the home has resulted in law reform. Law reform has occurred in most States in Australia and there are now stronger laws to protect the victims. Each State has slightly different legislation, but the law now makes a very clear statement that violence in the home is not acceptable and that nobody, no matter what, deserves violence.

Domestic violence is criminal assault, punishable by law.

Protection Orders

Victims of violence are able to seek protection from the Courts in the form of a Protection Order. These orders are called by different names in different states: domestic violence protection orders, intervention orders, apprehended violence orders, and so on. The aim of the Court in awarding these orders to a victim of violence is to restrict the behaviour of the abuser, to protect the victim from violence, intimidation, harassment and from living in fear. For example, a man may be restricted from coming within a certain distance of a woman, or from attending her place of residence or her workplace. Children can be included on these orders if the violence is happening to them as well.

If the terms of the order are broken, then the police may make an arrest.

Protection orders do act as a deterrent to further violence in most circumstances, however, there are many situations where this "piece of paper" is not successful as a deterrent. Sometimes the threat to people's lives is too great to take any risks and the only way a woman can live in safety is to be in a secret location.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Since the silence has been broken and more people are speaking out about violence in the home, many people are uncertain and confused about what they can do if they know somebody who is being abused. Here are some ideas.

Be a Believer

Listen carefully to what a victim of violence in the home tells you and believe it. It is hard for people to reach out because they often feel that the violence is their fault, or they feel shame. Women generally experience violence for many years before they can bring themselves to talk about it. Too often women reach out to someone and they are not listened to or not believed or the violence is not taken seriously.

Do take violent behaviour seriously. Be intolerant of such behaviour. Respond in terms of violence being unacceptable under any circumstances – there are no excuses or justification for violence. Ask the woman how you could best support her. She has to make her own decisions, but you can support her and assure her that she should not have to put up with violence and that she does not deserve it.

Safety

It is most important that victims of violence realize that their lives are in danger. Violence gets worse over time and does not go away of its own accord. A man who is capable of violence is capable of murder. Discuss with her strategies for keeping herself safe and for developing escape routes. Whether the woman wants to stay in the relationship or leave, the need for safety should be emphasised. Hiding a spare set of car keys is a good idea, or even thinking through an escape plan can be useful.

Police

Because violence in the home is against the law, the police are the people to be involved. There

is evidence to suggest that calling the police reduces the likelihood of further violence. Arrest seems to be the best intervention in reducing the probability of new incidents of violence.

If you know violence is going on, call the police immediately. Encourage women to call the police. Encourage women to teach their children to get out of the house, run to a neighbour's house or a phone box, and to call the police. They will have to be able to tell the police the address. Children should be encouraged to ring the police from a phone outside their own house because they could be at grave risk if they are caught in the act inside their house. Children should be encouraged to have a network of trusted adults they can go to for help.

Refuges

Make sure you know how to contact a refuge to organize emergency accommodation. It is best that a woman does not escape to a place of a friend or relative because these are the first places the perpetrator of the violence will look. Refuges are the best places for women escaping violence in an emergency situation because refuge workers will know what to do.

Crisis Services

Some places have crisis services which have been set up to respond to domestic violence situations. Contact these services and find out how they operate and what they are able to do.

Fear

Fear can have a paralysing effect on women and many women stay in abusive relationships because they are too afraid to leave. This fear is well founded. **Take fear seriously** and avoid reassurance that everything will be all right. Lives are at risk and you need to respond sensitively to fears for safety. Many threats to kill are carried out.

Priorities

Safety must be the first priority and concerns about marriages and intact families must be put aside. It may take a woman a long time to decide to leave, because there are such pressures to stay and disadvantages in leaving.

Be patient and understanding about her doubts and indecision. Pushing people does not help, but good ideas, clarity, listening and support do. You can probably be helpful in ordering priorities, one step at a time, and in determining which decisions can safely be put off.

Children

Whether the blows are falling on the child's body or not, they are victims of violence in the home. Children very often live in fear of the next outburst of violence and they sometimes try to intervene and get hurt in the process. They may tell you about what is happening at home. They are likely to think that the violence is their fault. Listen to them and believe what they say. Your reaction may be crucial in terms of the child's general wellbeing. It is very important for a child to know what you think about violence because you are probably one of the few people outside their household whom they can talk to and trust.

Sometimes children indicate in drawings or play that there is violence at home. If a child discloses violence to you, here are some ideas.

- Believe what they tell you.
- Talk to them about what happens and be understanding about their fears.
- Acknowledge their feelings about the violence being their fault, and assure them that it is not.
- Discuss with the child how the two of you can talk about the picture to their mother.
- Give the child's mother every chance to talk to you about the child's disclosure by expressing concern about the child's fear.
- Indicate that you are open to discuss the matter and that you take violence seriously.

- Give her phone numbers and information which will be of use to her if she decides to take some action.
- Be encouraging and supportive by telling her she does not have to put up with it.

Break the Silence

Women will be reluctant to talk about violence sometimes and all you can do is indicate your willingness to be supportive. You can sensitively ask questions about her situation, but do not push her too hard. Be respectful of her, she is a survivor with incredible resources. Be respectful of her decision to remain silent, but do make sure she knows that she can phone the police, and that she has knowledge of her options, perhaps by giving her phone numbers and pamphlets for when she is ready to speak out.

Even when a woman is wanting to remain silent, you can break the silence. Speak about domestic violence generally, speak about things you have read, programs you have seen or other women you know. Do not be deterred by her reluctance because she may change her mind one day and talk to you if she knows that you feel at ease with the subject and that you are not going to blame or judge her.

It may however, be impossible for you to do anything and it is important for you to remember that you cannot fix the situation on your own. The impetus for change in the situation must come from the woman.

Perhaps at the very least you could show her this booklet.

If you are worried about particular children you are working with, you should discuss this concern with your colleagues and an advisor. Written observation notes in these instances may be very important.

CAN VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR BE PREVENTED?

Maybe you are wondering what you can do to prevent violent behaviour in children or how to educate children in a way which would encourage non-violent attitudes. Violent behaviour is completely consistent with the ideas and beliefs of a violent person. Violent behaviour stems from attitudes which condone violence in certain circumstances.

Our society's institutions – schools, churches, governments, workplaces – are structured in a way that assigns a great deal of power to a small number of people at the top, and little or no power to those at the bottom. These inequalities are rarely questioned, and we become accustomed to some people winning and some people losing, some students excel, many fail, some people are rich and others poor, and so on.

Encouraging Co-operation versus Reinforcing Inequality

A belief in equality is inherent in a co-operative approach to problems. This equality can be modelled to children by listening to their wants, ideas, complaints and so on, and by asking them to listen to yours. Negotiation is difficult with young children, but attempts to work towards mutually acceptable outcomes is possible. It is important that children understand that they have rights, but that you have rights too. They can be helped to learn about each other's rights as well.

Outcomes which satisfy both children involved in a conflict can be achieved. Child care workers can show children they believe in the possibility of violence free negotiation by their responses e.g. when children are fighting over a toy, the worker can say "You've got a problem haven't you? Each of you wants this toy. What can you do to solve this problem?"

Children can be encouraged to examine the implications of their proposed solutions. For example, "what do you think would happen if I gave it to you?"

Authority

Authority can be exercised in a way that is respectful and does not erode a child's confidence or belief in self e.g. "I know you'd love to continue playing with this, and what a shame it is already time to pack up". This response acknowledges the child's position, yet respectfully asks for co-operation.

Equality

Try to help children understand the concept of equal rights with other children, in terms of gender, age, size and so on e.g. avoid statements like "who had it first?" which imply superior rights. Because the notion of ownership of property relates very closely to the dynamic between a violent man and his female partner, that is, he generally believes that she is his property, it is important to teach children the concept of equality.

When two children are fighting over a toy, a worker could say something like –

"You two have a problem here"

(this implies that the problem is equally shared)

"You both want to play on this bike"

(this describes the problem in equal terms)

"Can either of you think of a way to give you both what you want?"

(this implies that they both can be satisfied)

"Is it possible for you both to have the bike at once?"

(this points out the uselessness of the argument and invites ideas for a solution)

"How do you think you could work this out so than no one gets hurt?"

(this encourages mutual concern for the other's feelings, or rights, and discourages "hurting" as a solution to the conflict)

Respect

When a person regards another equally, and with genuine respect, they will not be violent to that person. Respect is demonstrated by acceptance of differences and so on. Listening to children when you do not agree is respectful. Workers can say something like "I know you are bigger than Jane, you also have different names, and can you see how you do different drawings". This response normalizes differences and dismisses the importance of size, by referring to obvious differences like names.

Also, non-competitive environments help children learn that they are worthy of respect without needing to be a winner, the best, the biggest, or the strongest, and that they can respect others who are different. It is very useful for children to learn tolerance and acceptance of differences.

Violent Children

Children who become violent towards other children need to understand that they have no right to physically hurt another. It is not acceptable for children to be allowed to take out their aggression on others and they must be taught attitudes at a very early age that they are responsible for their own behaviour. Being angry is one thing, being violent is another.

Children will pick up workers' beliefs about violence. If a worker says, and means, "I won't allow hitting", children get the message 'hurting people is wrong'. Excuses, justification or explanations for violence should not be given any validity or attention, but feelings of anger or frustration can be acknowledged –

> *I know you are hurt and angry, I know you think it should be your turn on the bike now, but you must not push her off the bike. This is not an acceptable way for you to get what you want.*

Feelings

This is not to say that children must repress their feelings. Hurting another is not about expressing feelings, it is about hurting people. Nobody has the right to be violent. Workers' responses can either condone or reject violence –

> *I know that you are very upset about him taking your apple, but you must not hurt him, you have no right to do that. Let's go and talk to him about taking your apple.*

Attitudes

The attitude of a right to use force against another is the crux of the matter. This is the same attitude which causes all violent behaviour. When people are violent, even out of distress or anguish, they are acting out of a belief that they have a right to be violent because they have been hurt emotionally or physically.

Punishment

Adults who use physical force to punish children are actually teaching the child that violence is acceptable if the more powerful person is doing it. Smacking or hitting, regardless of the severity, demonstrates to the child that the use of force is legitimate when rules get broken, and this is the same dynamic which exists in a violent relationship.

Gender

It is important that girls and boys are treated in the same way, as difficult as this is to achieve. If boys and girls grow up respecting each other, girls believing they are worthwhile, equal human beings, and boys believing that they have no more than equal rights with girls, then the dynamic which is the basis for violence just would not exist.

Workers can say things like "when a girl says to stop, she means it" – messages like these counteract ideas and habits about girls not being taken seriously.

If a worker hears "she's only a girl", it is important to make a response, e.g. "yes, she is a girl and girls can do all the things that boys can do". Similarly, the "boys will be boys" argument can be challenged, e.g. "I know he's a boy, and I also believe hitting people is unacceptable".

REMEMBER

- **It is likely that you know children living with violence.**
- **Violence in the home is against the law.**
- **Believe what children say about violence.**
- **Many women do leave violent relationships and are able to live in safety.**
- **Nothing justifies violence.**

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NATIONAL HELP NUMBERS

NSW		
Refuge Referrals and Resource Centre		(02) 560 1605
Domestic Violence Advocacy Service		(02) 637 3741
VIC		
Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre		(03) 387 9155
Refuge Referrals		(03) 329 8433
QLD		
Crisis Care		(07) 227 5999
		(008) 17 7135
Domestic Violence Resource Centre		(07) 857 6299
ACT		
Domestic Violence Crisis Service		(06) 248 7800
TAS		
Crisis Intervention Unit	Hobart	(002) 30 2529
	Launceston	(003) 32 2379
	Burnie	(004) 30 2246
Domestic Violence Action Group		(002) 34 3240
SHE Phone Counselling for Women in and from Abusive Relationships		(002) 23 7775
SA		
Crisis Care		(08) 232 3300
		(008) 18 8158
Domestic Violence Service		(08) 232 0040
WA		
Crisis Care Unit		(09) 325 1111
		(008) 19 9008
NT		
Darwin Crisis Line		(089) 81 9227
		(008) 01 9116
Alice Springs Community Care Line		(089) 50 3644